

Testimony by Garry Monk, Executive Director, National Veterans Council for Legal Redress, and Conley Monk, Director, National Veterans Council for Legal Redress in Support of S.B. 753

An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons for Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts

Madam Chair Flexer, Mr. Chairman Fox, and Members of the Committee,

Our names are Garry Monk and Conley Monk. We are residents of New Haven, Connecticut and are registered voters in Connecticut State House District 92. Garry Monk is the Executive Director of the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress, and Conley Monk is the Director of the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress. We are both members of the NAACP Connecticut State Conference.

We are writing in support of S.B. 753. It is high time that Connecticut finally put an end to the unjust practice of prison gerrymandering.

For us, the issue is personal. For a time, our nephew was incarcerated at Enfield Correctional Institution. During his incarceration, our family supported him financially and when he was eventually released, he returned to New Haven. Although our nephew was taken to the opposite side of the state, he still remained a part of our family and hence a part of our community. He was not supported by the residents living immediately outside the walls of the prison, nor was he in contact with them. It was an insult for him to be counted there as if he were a member of that community.

Our family's story is one of many that speak to the injustice of prison gerrymandering. Overwhelmingly, this injustice is inflicted on communities of color. Connecticut has the fifth highest rate of incarcerated Black men in the country. African Americans and Latinos in Connecticut prisons outnumber incarcerated whites 2-to-1. The emotional and financial toll of having a loved one incarcerated exacts a tremendous cost on families across Connecticut, including mine. To subsequently have our votes watered down as a result of this incarceration is insult to injury. It says to thousands of voters across Connecticut: your voices matter less.

Last year, we, along with several other individuals, and the national and state conference of the NAACP, were the plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging prison gerrymandering in Connecticut as unconstitutional. While the litigation ultimately was set aside due to the pandemic, we remain committed to advocating for an end to this voting rights and racial injustice. Passing legislation this year is Connecticut's last chance to end this unfair practice before the legislature finalizes redistricting maps for the next decade. S.B. 753 is the best way to get this done, and we urge the legislature to pass this bill.

Throughout the country, people are waking up to the injustice of the many voting rights violations that harm our Black and brown communities, including the practice of prison gerrymandering. Ten states so far have passed laws similar to the one being considered by this committee to abolish prison gerrymandering. As a result, their elections are fairer, their

legislatures are more representative, and their citizens are viewed as equals in the political process. We urge this committee to put its support behind S.B. 753, and make this proud state the eleventh state to reject prison gerrymandering.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Garry Monk & Conley Monk